

September 27, 2013

To: Executive Board

Subject: **Class Pass Program Update**

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### **Recommendation**

Receive and file an update on Foothill Transit's Class Pass Program.

### **Analysis**

In March 2013 the Executive Board approved a student rider pilot program at Mount San Antonio College that would launch in the fall 2013 semester. Soon thereafter, Foothill Transit's Executive Director was approached by the University of La Verne who expressed an interest in a student rider pilot program as well. At the June 28, 2013 Executive Board meeting, a pilot program at the University of La Verne was approved by the Board.

Foothill Transit staff designed each pilot program with different benefits, planning strategies, and timelines based on the needs of each college's campus population as determined by conversations with representatives of the administration of both institutions. While the overall goals of the Class Pass Program are the same for each college, variations between each colleges' registration processes, program details, and student population necessitated slightly different approaches to each pilot program.

**Marketing** - The first marketing item created was the name and logo for the program that will represent Foothill Transit's student rider program at all schools. After looking at many options, "Class Pass" was selected. The marketing campaign for the Class Pass was created with the intention that it be similar for each participating campus. There is a template for all schools that can be modified for each school by incorporating the school name and other information unique to each campus.

**Class Pass Pilot** - The Class Pass provides students with Foothill Transit services at no cost for three semesters. This gives students an opportunity to experience Foothill Transit and provides a cost-free opportunity to find out how the system can work for them. By allowing students to ride throughout our service area we hope to create riders that use the system not only for school, but to travel to work and social outings. The pilot will allow Foothill Transit to gather accurate ridership data to project the cost to the college to continue the program beyond the pilot phase. During the third semester of the pilot, Foothill Transit representatives will discuss the projected cost of the program with each college's administrators. The final decision on the continuation of the program at each college will lie in the hands of the college administration and/or the students by way of vote.

The Mt. SAC Class Pass allows students enrolled in at least one unit of credit to ride Foothill Transit's local and Silver Streak lines year round. If a student is registered for fall or spring semester the pass will be good until the beginning of the next semester. The University of La Verne Class Pass is slightly different in that it is available not only to students but also University staff. Students and staff will be able to ride local and Silver Streak all year other than during the University's summer break.

**Technology Development** - The development of a tracking system for the TAP cards was the first item to be addressed with each school. In order to reduce the amount of fraud and monetary waste, a system of tracking was created for each school. Foothill Transit administrative staff coordinated with each college to create a tracking program linking the student ID to the TAP card's serial number. Each tracking method differs based on the college's distribution method and infrastructure. By linking the student ID with the TAP card number that is issued, changes can be made remotely to the TAP card and the fare on that card. For example, when a student withdraws from all their classes they become ineligible for the program. Each night a report is automatically generated listing these students and the fare media is removed from the TAP card. All of this has been automated and there is no manual reporting to be run by school administrators or Foothill Transit.

For Mt. SAC specifically, an additional program was written by the college staff to enable persons other than college staff to register a tap card for the student. This allowed Foothill Transit staff to assist in the distribution of Class Passes on campus. With the swipe of a mag card, this program will verify that the student is registered and if they already have a TAP card on file. This reduces fraud by preventing the issuing of multiple cards to a student who already has one.

**Mt. SAC Distribution** - Mt. SAC is undergoing some organizational changes that made Class Pass distribution difficult for them to staff during the first two weeks of school. Foothill Transit staffed a table on campus in front of the bookstore and distributed Class Passes. The table was on campus a few days before the first day of school and the first two weeks of school for a total of nine days. By staffing a booth on campus Foothill Transit's administrative staff was able to directly address questions from students and provide visibility for Foothill Transit and the Class Pass.

The Mt. SAC Class Pass has been a runaway success. A total of 5,287 TAP cards were distributed to students with no technical issues. During the first two weeks of school, ridership on the two lines serving campus escalated. Mt. SAC Class Pass riders increased each weekday for the first three weeks of school. During the third Monday of school there were 4,077 TAPs on our system from Mt. SAC Class Pass riders. Of those students riding that day, 2,085 used Line 486 that serves the campus directly, the average weekday boardings for Line 486 in September 2012, was 4,661 on the entire line. In another month or so we will be able to more fully analyze the effect of the Class

Pass but it appears that the Class Pass will greatly increase ridership along the lines that serve the campus and overall ridership as well.

**Class Pass Ridership** - There are two Foothill Transit lines directly serving Mt. SAC - Lines 289 and 486. Line 289 operates between the Puente Hills Mall and Cal Poly Pomona and serves Nogales and Walnut High Schools in addition to Cal Poly and Mt SAC. It has a load factor of 30 percent, on average buses have 30 percent of their seats full, and an increase in ridership from Class Pass riders should not create capacity issues with Line 289. Line 486 is a high volume line that operates between El Monte Station and Cal Poly Pomona via Mt. SAC. It had an 85 percent load factor prior to the Class Pass. The immediate success of the program filled Line 486 buses to the point where students were initially being left at the stop because buses were full as they approached the stop. This was happening both heading into campus (eastbound) and at stops leaving campus (westbound). Staff was aware of the potential for over-capacity issues and when this became an issue administrative staff quickly had the service increased on Line 486. Daily ridership numbers were still increasing when service was added and it seems the issue was addressed without losing riders. Trips were added throughout the day east and west bound starting during the 7:00am hour. The Line 486 schedule had buses arriving every 15 minutes, all day, and the enhancements made added buses to at least two of the trips each hour. Prior to the added service there were four buses an hour. With the addition there will be at least six trips each hour.

Class Passes will continue to be distributed throughout the semester on each campus at a designated location and those locations will be staffed by campus administrative staff. The University of La Verne Class Pass soft launch began on August 26 during the first week of school. Students have shown an interest in the program with very little outreach. The marketing plan rolls out the fourth week of school and with the increase in marketing the distribution of passes and ridership will increase. It is not expected that the University of La Verne program will affect volume on our lines like Mt. SAC has because of the size of the school and the routes that serve campus. For comparison, Mt. SAC's student population is 30,000 while the University of La Verne's student population is 6,000. In addition, Lines 289 and 486 serve Mt. SAC directly, while Line 492 serves the northern perimeter of University of La Verne and Line 197 serves one stop adjacent to campus. We will continue to monitor the lines and interact with students to market the program.

Overall, the Class Pass program has been a success and students now have Foothill Transit bus passes in their hands and are using them. The launch of the Class Pass program was a major effort that required the participation of members of the Foothill Transit administrative team from across a number of departments in order to be successful. Thanks to that cross-departmental participation, the program is successful and booming.

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For future Class Pass locations, we hope that based on the success of the Mt. SAC and University of La Verne programs other colleges and students will want the Class Pass at their school. Should this happen, the groundwork is done and a launch at other locations will be smooth and seamless.

Sincerely,



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